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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Prison Conditions of Putin Critic Yashin Deteriorating – Lawyer

By AFP

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This grab from AFP video shows Russian opposition figure Ilya Yashin, who was sentenced in December 2022 to 8.5 years in jail for discrediting the Russian army fighting in Ukraine, appears on a screen via videolink from a colony outside Smolensk during a court hearing in Moscow on June 20. **Andrey Borodulin / AFP**

Prison conditions for Russian opposition politician Ilya Yashin — serving 8.5 years for denouncing Moscow's Ukraine offensive — have considerably worsened after he was moved to a punitive cell, his lawyer told AFP Thursday.

Fears for jailed Kremlin critics have risen since opposition leader Alexei Navalny died in his Arctic prison in February.

Yashin — a former ally of assassinated opposition figure Boris Nemtsov — was imprisoned in late 2022 for having denounced "murders of civilians" in the Ukrainian town of Bucha.

After a court hearing, Yashin's lawyer Mikhail Biryukov told AFP that the 40-year-old was moved to a "PKT" prison cell, similar to one where Navalny was held.

Biryukov said Yashin now has "limited movement on the territory of the prison and limited parcels and visits."

Food parcels are key to staying in good health in Russian prisons.

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Biryukov said Yashin was earlier kept in a "barrack of around 40 to 60 people" in a prison in the western Smolensk region.

He now has "special conditions" in a harsh isolation cell.

Yashin appeared via videolink at a court hearing to protest being designated a "foreign agent," a label used to silence dissent.

"This law was created to consolidate the power of Vladimir Putin," he said.

Wearing a black prison uniform, he smiled and held on to the metal bars of a cell, footage showed.

His mother, Tatiana Yashina, was at the hearing and said she was "of course worried" about the new conditions.

"But we believe in him. That he will get through this," she said.

Now that he has been moved to the harsher cell, she will only be allowed "short [visits], once or twice a year."

Vladimir Kara-Murza, a dual Russian and U.K. national serving 25 years on treason charges, has also been moved to the PKT cell in his Siberian prison.

His exiled lawyer Vadim Prokhorov said on Facebook Wednesday that the prison administration had decided to place Kara-Murza there for "six months."

He said the "formal reason" for the decision was that he "for a few seconds held his hand not behind his back."

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